Community Reporting with Adults with Learning Disabilities

Internal Good Practice

People's Voice Media / Institute of Community Reporters (ICR)

Overview of the Project

The aim of the project was to adapt the photography strand of the Community Reporting programme to make it accessable for a group of adult trainee Community Reporters who have moderate to severe learning disabilities. The training course was delivered over 10 weeks, with each weekly session lasting for 2-hours.

The project was set-up by Toxteth TV (a social licensee of the Institutte of Community Reporters) in collaboration with the WEA North West, with the aim to make storytelling and digitial learning programmes more engaging and inclusive for adults with learning disabilities. As part of this objective, Oakfield Day Service, collaborated on the

project. Oakfield Day Service provides support to adults with learning disabilities, mental health needs and physical disabilities and as part of this project they selected 10 of their current service users to take part and provided 2 support workers as additional training assistance for the project.

The 10 trainee Community Reporters were aged 27+ and had a range of learning disabilities including:

- Dyslexia (reading)
- Dysgraphia (writing)
- Dyspraxia (motor skills)
- Aphasia (language comprehension)
- Downs' Syndrome
- Difficulties in information processing and memory

With these barriers to learning, the group also struggle to remain focused on a specific task for an extended period of time. Therefore, the delivery of the project had to be adapted in order to meet their needs.

Over the course of the 10 week training programme, the trainee Community Reporters took photographs, annotated them with labels and captions and created a digital photo album. The course had the following structure:

- **Week 1:** Introduction to the project and initial skills assessment/diagnostics

- **Week 2:** Exploring the places where we could find photographs
- **Week 3:** Group Photography Trip to Liverpool Central Library (Practical Task)
- **Week 4:** Exploring the purposes of photography
- **Week 5:** Taking for photographs for different purposes (Practical Task)
- **Week 6:** Exploring the principles of Photography (composition, what makes a good photograph etc.)
- **Week 7:** Photograhy Walk on Windsor Street (Practical Task)
- **Week 8:** Group Photography Trip to the Cathedral (Practical Task)
- **Week 9:** Group Photography Trip to The Florrie (Practical Task)
- **Week 10:** Editing Photographs and Evaluation

The trainee Community Reporters explored some basic 'theoretical' concepts related to photography (i.e. framing, purposes of photography, storytelling in photography) and learned new digital skills (i.e. how to use the basic functions on a tablet and to navigate it). Through combining these two learning points in a series of practical activities such as photography walks (telling the story of a place through a journey) and visits to new spaces (telling the story of a visit through photographs) the trainee Community Reporters were able to use tablet technology to explore digital photography and basic community reporting practices.

Digital aspects of good practice

The project had a number of digital good practice elements that are related to the pedagogic and methodological aspects of good practice outline beneath. In summary, the digital elements of good practice were:

Development of Core Digital Literacies: The project developed the participants' core digital literacies (as identified by JISC) as part of the tablet photography and Community Reporting training, such as *ICT Proficency* (i.e. using tablets, using camera, using Apps), *Media Literacies* (i.e. exploring where we find photographs and their different purposes), *Digital Creation* (i.e. taking digital photographs) and *Communication, Collaboration and Participations* (i.e. selecting photographs and creating a digital photograph album).

Digital Log of Learning & Development: Usually the WEA uses a written Independent Learning Plan to assess their participants' skills at the start and the end of their courses. This form needs participants to be literate in order to complete it effectively and for it to have learning value and as the trainee Community Reporters had limited reading, comprehension and writing skills, the form was deemed unuseful by the Community Reporter Trainer. Instead, 'selfies' were used to document the trainee Community Reporters' learning journeys on the project. This involved the trainees taking a selfie at the beginning of the project and labeling it with what they already knew and what they wanted to know, and then again at

the end of the course with a caption about what they had learned. This method simultaneously provided opportunities for the trainee Community Reporters to reflect on their own learning but also to develop their digital skills further in relation to tablet photography. Furthermore, the difference between the quality of the selfies taken at the start of the project, when compared to those taken at the end (and levels of support required to complete these tasks) further demonstrated to the Community Reporter Trainer and the Support Workers the learning that had taken place during the course.

Media Advocacy through Digital Tools: As part of the project the trainee Community Repoters were equipped with the skills to tell stories about their experiences (i.e. walks and trips to places) through photography. This provided them with a visual references to activities they had taken part in and provided memory stimuli when talking about these experiences in later sessions.
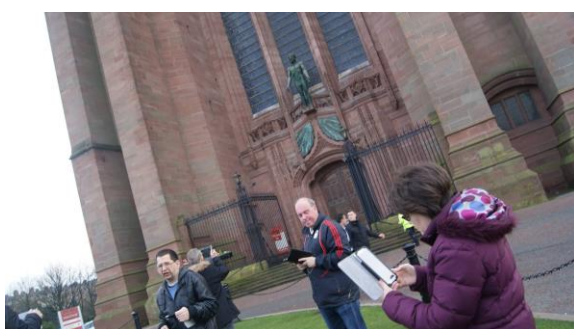
Pedagogic and/or methodological aspects of good practice

At its core, this project sought to make photography-based Community Reporting practices accessible for adults with learning disabilities. The elements of good practice in terms of the approach taken are:

Adapting the programme: The course focused on just one medium of Community Reporting – photography – and identified the core elements of this medium that could be used to tell stories and what the key principles of it was. Essentially, the full Community Reporting training was not offered, but rather the key aspects of it that related to photography. The thinking that underpinned this was that the 'full' Community Reporting offer would be explored over a series of courses that focused on different mediums, with the practices associated Community Reporting being embedded within them. Furthermore, this course just focused on how photography could be used to capture stories via photography walks (i.e. telling the story of a place) and how photography could be use to tell the story of a trop (i.e. a visit to a specific attraction). This gave the course more structure and parameters than conventional Community Reporting projects that usually provide an opportunity for trainee Community Reporters to tell any story that like above their lives and experiences. Additionally, the structure of the sessions were adapted to include lengthy recaps and learning reflections. At least 50% of each session was dedicated to these types of activities, with the remaining time allocated to either new learning (i.e. introducing a new concept) or practice (i.e. a practical task).

Adapting the resources: Rather than using handouts that contained a lot of words and writing, the Community Reporter Trainer created flashcards with key words/phrases and icons. These were used to communicate the key concepts and activities throughout

the course. Using visual references to the group (a) enabled the Trainer to communicate ideas more effectively to them and (b) helped to recap and build on previous learning from the course where these icons had been used. In essence, the icons were used as a reference point for understanding.

Areas for development

There are a range of ways that this good practice case study could be developed further. First, this approach could be written-up in a formalised way and shared accrossed the ICR network so that other trainers and social licensees can make the photography-based part of Community Reporting more accessible to groups with special educational needs. Second, the resources produced (flashcards, icon-driven handouts) etc. could be integrated within the ICR training materials so that the basic concepts around photography-based Community Reporting are easier to communicate to learning disability groups. Finally, this particular group of Community Reporters plan to attend a second course that builds on the skills and knowledge developed during this project, but this time uses tablet technology to capture video stories. This new course will use the ICT skills and knowledge of photography from its predesssor and explore how these can be useful when recording video interviews. This

new course will also embed new learning such as writing questions and interview techniques.

Which aspects are transferable?

The pedagogy that underpinned this project (as outlined earlier) could be transferred to other digital projects in order to make them more inclusive and accessible for adults with learning disabilities. In particular this could include: (1) Breaking larger courses down into a series of smaller courses; (2) Adapt or develop resources so that they include less text and more icons; and (3) Plan courses with extensive elements of recap and review.

Summary Points

Number of Participants: 10
Target Group(s): Adults with learning disabilities (moderate to severe)
Course Details: 10 x 2-hour sessions
Number of Staff: 1 x Community Reporter Trainer and 2 x Support Workers
Place: Liverpool, United Kingdom